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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6824
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RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1313
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT 7673
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RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 7035
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN (J. MUDGE), DRL/PHD (C. KUCHTA-HELBLING), DRL/IRF (N. HEWETT)

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SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: SUPREME COURT DENIES HARE KRISHNA APPEAL ON EVE OF CONGRESS OF WORLD RELIGIONS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On August 24, the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan denied the Hare Krishnas' appeal of an adverse lower court ruling concerning title to their commune in the Karasai district, near Almaty. The GOK now intends to form a special commission to resolve the issue. The Hare Krishnas are wary of the special commission, and are afraid that it is a smokescreen to deflect criticism of the government on the eve of the Congress of World Religions in Astana. The Hare Krishna movement in Kazakhstan is planning a public-relations blitz, and Hare Krishnas around the world are reportedly planning to protest in front of Kazakhstani embassies. End summary.

HARE KRISHNAS BLINDSIDED BY SUPREME COURT

¶2. (U) On August 24, the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan denied the Hare Krishnas' appeal of an adverse lower court ruling concerning title to their commune in the Karasai district, near Almaty. The Supreme Court decision is the latest step in a long-running effort by the Karasai akim to invalidate the Hare Krishnas' ownership of their land, though the government was never a party to the original transaction, and the statute of limitations expired long before the government first initiated their lawsuits.

¶3. (U) According to the Hare Krishnas, they were not notified in advance of the August 24 proceeding, and did not learn of the court's decision until they contacted the court clerk on August 31. Post did not learn of the decision until contacted by the Hare Krishnas on September 6. The Hare Krishnas said that the Supreme Court decision did not resolve or even address most of the legal arguments made by the Krishnas, and essentially repeated the lower-level oblast decision.

NEXT STEP: A NEW SPECIAL COMMISSION

¶4. (SBU) The Hare Krishnas report that the Religious Issues Committee of the Ministry of Justice now intends to form a special commission to resolve the Hare Krishna land issue in Karasai. The Krishnas have been asked to participate on the commission, but say that government representatives have been unable to explain to them the purpose, authority, or composition of the commission. The Krishnas intend to participate, but fear that the commission is a smokescreen to deflect criticism on the eve of the Congress of World

Religions, hosted by President Nazarbayev in Astana on September 12-15.

HARE KRISHNAS PLAN PUBLIC-RELATIONS BLITZ

¶5. (U) The Hare Krishna movement in Kazakhstan has contacted supporters around the world, and they expect their supporters to conduct protests in front of Kazakhstani embassies in several cities around the world. The Hare Krishnas also intend to contact the media about their situation.

COMMENT

¶6. (U) Comment: The GOK's handling of the Hare Krishna case runs contrary to their message of religious tolerance carefully constructed in advance of the Congress of World Religions. The legal basis for the government's actions appears weak, and past comments by local government officials that the Hare Krishnas are "not accepted as a religion" will help fuel a brewing public relations storm for the government. Post will continue to follow events as they develop. End comment.

ORDWAY